

IN THE CLAIMS:

1-19 (Canceled).

20 (New). A bulk food product slicing machine comprising:

- a rotatable blade having a sharp edge;
- a drive mechanism for rotating said blade; and
- a blade sharpener assembly mounted adjacent to said blade and having a sharpening stone, a deburring stone, a retractable shield and a sharpening actuator, wherein the sharpening stone, the retractable shield and the sharpening actuator are each biased into normal positions such that the retractable shield is normally positioned so as to substantially shield the sharpening stone from slicing debris during food product slicing operations, wherein the sharpening stone, the retractable shield and the sharpening actuator are arranged such that movement of the sharpening actuator to initiate sharpening causes both (i) the retractable shield to move out of its normal position into a retracted position and (ii) the sharpening stone to move out of its normal position into sharpening contact with the blade, including moving linearly downwardly toward the blade.

21 (New). The slicing machine of claim 20 wherein the sharpener assembly includes a cover having a lateral position, relative to a plane defined by the sharp edge of the blade, that remains unchanged during movement of the sharpening actuator to initiate sharpening.

22 (New). The slicing machine of claim 20 wherein the sharpening actuator is moved linearly downwardly to initiate sharpening.

23 (New). The slicing machine of claim 22 wherein the deburring stone, sharpening stone and retractable shield are associated with a frame that is biased upward via a spring disposed around a post.

24 (New). The slicing machine of claim 23 wherein the sharpening actuator engages the frame and moves it downwardly to initiate sharpening.

25 (New). The slicing machine of claim 20 wherein the sharpening actuator is mounted for linear movement in a stationary guide, the deburring stone, sharpening stone and retractable shield are associated with a frame that is contacted and moved by the sharpening actuator.

26 (New). The slicing machine of claim 25 wherein sharpening actuator engages the guide in a tongue and groove manner.

27 (New). A bulk food product slicing machine comprising:

- a rotatable blade having a sharp edge;
- a drive mechanism for rotating said blade; and
- a blade sharpener assembly mounted adjacent to said blade and having a sharpening stone, a deburring stone, a retractable shield and a sharpening actuator, wherein the sharpening stone, the retractable shield and the sharpening actuator are each biased into normal positions such that the retractable shield is normally positioned so as to substantially shield the sharpening stone from slicing debris during food product slicing operations, wherein the sharpening stone, the retractable shield and the sharpening actuator are arranged such that movement of the sharpening actuator to initiate sharpening causes both (i) the retractable shield to move out of its normal position into a retracted position and (ii) the sharpening stone to move out of its normal position into sharpening contact with the blade, wherein the deburring stone, sharpening stone and retractable shield are associated with a frame that is contacted and moved downwardly by the sharpening actuator.